

CSX locomotive crash results in air pollution of local Baltimore community

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Late last month, a collision between two locomotives resulted in a diesel fuel spill inside a CSX railyard. No official estimate has been given for how much fuel spilled.

The CSX facility is north of Curtis Bay, a neighboring community. Jay Apperson, the spokesperson for the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE), was quoted saying that the spill was “contained on CSX property,” and alleged that it presented “no risk to the community.”

Four days prior, on May 20, the Baltimore City Fire Department tweeted in the early morning that they had responded to a hazardous material spill at a facility owned by W.R. Grace and Company, north of Hawkins Point, another neighboring community to Curtis Bay. The *Baltimore Sun* reported the leak contained 50 to 75 gallons of nitric acid spilled from a vacuum truck.

Phylicia Porter, councilwoman for Baltimore’s 10th District, which includes Curtis Bay, told *Baltimore Brew* that she felt concerned regarding the spills and leaks and that her office is taking a “pro-active approach” to ensure residents were aware of what happened. “This process needs to be looked at, and we are going to be talking to MDE about it,” she explained.

The Brew noted that the Community of Curtis Bay Association (CCBA), an organization for residents and workers in Curtis Bay, has appealed to MDE and Maryland Democratic Governor, Wes Moore, to leverage their authority to address the recent ecological disasters. CCBA said these events “will continue to happen until our officials move beyond rhetoric and take action for environmental justice.”

CCBA published a statement on May 19, titled “A Call for Declaration of Air Pollution Emergency in Curtis Bay,” demanding that the governor and MDE

leverage a provision within Maryland law, Section 2-105 of Maryland Environment Code, to declare an air pollution emergency.

On June 1, following the incidents, CCBA tweeted a picture showing a dirty air filter that appeared to contradict the MDE’s claims that “no risk to the community” existed. The organization appealed for MDE to declare an air pollution emergency and that they have been left waiting for an official response.

WSWS reporters went to Curtis Bay and spoke with the community. One man who frequents Curtis Bay commented on the local authorities’ hypocrisy, stating, “If we spill something, the police will do something.” He added that Moore “should do something” and that CSX “should take responsibility.”

Monica, a young worker living in Curtis Bay near the railroads, compared the impact of the incidents to the ecological disaster in the aftermath of the East Palestine, Ohio derailment. She noted that big trains run through the community along with large storage tankers. Hinting at a conspiracy between the state and CSX, she said that “they [MDE] don’t want to put people in a panic” but the spill “could really be affecting people here.”

The consistent contamination of Curtis Bay is turning the community into another ecological disaster. On December 23, 2022, MDE fined CSX \$15,000 and an additional \$100,000 to South Baltimore Community Land Trust due to a series of air pollution violations after an explosion occurred at a coal pier. The CSX facility was located on Benhill Avenue, several hundred feet from Curtis Bay, leaving the neighborhood to bring a separate lawsuit against the railroad corporation.

The fee was a slap on the wrist for the corporation, which pocketed \$14.8 billion in revenue last year, an 18

percent increase over 2021. The corporation has a profit rate of 28.35 percent.

Curtis Bay is one of many working-class neighborhoods contaminated by corporations, which is treated as “the cost of doing business” by American capitalism. On March 30, an explosion occurred at a chocolate factory in Pennsylvania, leaving seven dead and rocking neighboring cities. East Palestine, Ohio, suffered its first ecological disaster on February 3 after a railcar derailment poisoned the town's soil, air, and water.

Emboldened by the compliant rail union bureaucracy, corporations and the two big business parties are assaulting working class livelihoods and communities at the national and local level.

President Joe Biden, at the time of the railroaders’ national contract negotiations in 2022, declared that it was his duty to outlaw a threatened strike of over 120,000 rail workers because of the undue harm it would inflict on “working families.” Shortly after, Biden and Congress imposed a despised national contract on the workers.

Rather than saving working class communities from harm, rail operators have been given carte blanche to cut safety standards, abuse their workforce and maximize profits. This has led to an increased frequency in rail-related industrial accidents, which took place on average about three times a day in 2022.

Abuses of workers have also continued. Forty car haulers remained locked out of a CSX railhead facility in Annapolis Junction, Maryland, after negotiations fell through on May 9 between an auto service contractor and workers under Teamsters Local 355.

The following day, due to the Biden administration's assault on the working class, the Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) announced the slashing of benefits for railroaders by tying it to the debt limit. The bureaucracy’s response to these attacks on the working class was simply to grovel before the railroad CEOs.



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